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Authority NND979620By EE NARA Date 1/18/88SECRET/SENSITIVEIndochinaIndochina Background

A PRC military delegation headed by a Vice Defense Minister visited Hanoi for two weeks in early March, just before the all-out North Vietnamese offensive. We do not know what was discussed during this visit. No public announcement was made at its conclusion which would indicate increased Chinese military or economic aid for Hanoi. We are reasonably certain that Peking did not encourage the North Vietnamese to press their military campaign against the South; but at the same time we do not think the Chinese pressured Hanoi to stay its hand. In short, Peking probably adopted a rather passive attitude, feeling that a combination of inaction on our part and the weakness of the Saigon government foreordained a victory for Hanoi, and that the costs to them of overtly objecting to the North Vietnamese offensive were prohibitive in terms of future Chinese influence in Indochina and with "third world" countries.

At the same time, we have received multiple indications from diplomatic and CAS reporting that Peking's relations with Hanoi are rather strained. North Vietnamese officials have expressed bitterness in diplomatic contacts about the Chinese takeover of the Paracel Islands in early 1974, and about limited PRC military and economic assistance--which they contrast with generous Soviet support. Peking now faces a difficult situation in Indochina. PRC leaders are probably concerned that continuing Vietnamese expansion into Laos and Cambodia, pressure on Thailand, and encouragement of instability elsewhere in the region will impinge on Chinese influence and give Moscow new openings in Southeast Asia.

Since the fall of Saigon, Peking has clearly signalled its interest in a stabilization of the current situation. Its message of congratulations to the Vietnamese stressed the division between the DRV and the successful insurgents in the south, who were said to face the difficult tasks of "carrying through their national and democratic revolution." This was a way of saying that the Chinese do not want Hanoi to rapidly incorporate the south into the DRV. As well, Peking has downplayed recent developments in Indochina as being a defeat for the U.S.

In Cambodia, Peking was unwilling to facilitate a negotiated resolution of the conflict, and failed to respond to your diplomatic initiatives of December

SECRET/SENSITIVE

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 919620

By CE NARA Date 4/18/88

SECRET/SENSITIVE

2

and January. The Chinese have sought to build up Sihanouk's position in the wake of the collapse of the Lon Nol government without any apparent success. We believe they will try to sustain a position for the Prince in order to limit Hanoi's influence (as well as that of the Soviets) and limit the spill-over effect into Laos and Thailand.

In discussing Indochina developments, you should stress, (a) our mutual interest in seeing the current situation stabilized, so as to limit Soviet opportunities in the region, (b) our desire to go beyond "Vietnam" to the central issues in our foreign policy, yet the fact that domestic political forces stimulated by recent developments will complicate this effort, and (c) your interest in PRC views on recent developments.

Indochina Talking Points:

-- We recognize that developments in Vietnam and Cambodia have complicated our foreign policy tasks, but we are determined to continue playing a strong international role and remain confident that we can do so.

-- We assume that we share an interest in seeing the evolution of independent states in Indochina. What do you see as the prospects for the Provisional Revolutionary Government in Vietnam? It is our impression that Hanoi has particularly warm feelings for Moscow at this time. What degree of access to Vietnam do you think Hanoi will give the Russians?

-- We are concerned that Hanoi is now in the process of overthrowing the coalition arrangement in Laos. This will raise questions in many people's minds about the value of agreements signed with communist governments.

SECRET/SENSITIVE

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND919620By EE NARA Date 7/13/88SECRET/SENSITIVE

3

-- We frankly were disturbed that in our efforts to see a negotiated resolution of the situation in Cambodia you did not even give us the courtesy of a reply to our contacts of December and January. We believe, as you seem to, that Sihanouk should play a role in the new government in Phnom Penh, and that Cambodia should not fall under Hanoi's control. What do you think are the prospects for Sihanouk being anything more than a figurehead?